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SIPDIS

FROM U.S. MISSION IN ROME

BANJUL FOR AMBASSADOR MCDONALD
STATE FOR PRM/P, AF/W AND IO/EDA BEHREND AND KOTOK
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USDA/FAS FOR CHAMBLISS/TILSWORTH/GAINOR
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: WFP BOARD APPROVES THE GAMBIA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
VALUED AT U.S. DOLLARS (USD) 6.92 MILLION - 14,680 METRIC
TONS

SUMMARY

1. The WFP Executive Board, at its first regular session (February 23-26), approved The Gambia development project 10311.0 entitled Support to Basic Education in Rural Vulnerable Regions. The project is for three years, with a total cost to WFP of USD 6.92 million. Beneficiaries are estimated at 145,830 (annual average). Over the life-of-project, WFP will supply (subject to the availability of funds) a total of 14,680 metric tons of food aid. End summary.

Background

2. The Gambia (population 1.5 million - July 2003 estimate) is a least developed (LDC) country, currently ranked 160 out of 173 in UNDP's Human Development Report. The Gambia has no substantial mineral or other natural resources and has a limited agricultural base. Economic progress remains highly dependent on sustained bilateral and multilateral aid. In December, 2003, the IMF highlighted The Gambia's deteriorating economic situation: "Macroeconomic imbalances have worsened, as evidenced by weak growth performance, high inflation, the sharp depreciation of the exchange rate and an increasing fiscal deficit...These developments threaten to impede progress on poverty reduction." In summary, although the country continues to work on institutional strengthening, it remains vulnerable to the political and social tensions in the sub-region, and governance is a concern.

U.S. intervention in support of WFP's efforts in The Gambia

3. Herewith the essence of the U.S. intervention:

-The Gambia was one of nine Sahelian countries that attended (September 9-10, in Dakar, Senegal) the WFP-sponsored Regional Ministerial Conference for the Launch of the "Alliance for Action" on School Feeding, Health and Basic Education for the Sahel. All countries of the region have pledged their support to the effort and jointly agreed that: a) integration of school feeding activities in government strategies and action plans, as well as in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) was essential to secure resources for this activity in the long term; and b) on the imperative need for collaboration at country level between central and local partners, as well as between the ministries of education and health - in this effort. In USDEL's view, big steps have already been taken to support primary education by the governments of a number of Sahelian countries. USDEL urged The Gambia and its sister Sahelian countries "not to let the momentum slide."

Support to WFP's development portfolio in The Gambia

4. Under the present on going operation related to school feeding ("Community-based school feeding," The Gambia 05932.1), WFP has received a total of USD 5.2 million in overall support. The United States is the major donor at USD 3.07 million. Japan has contributed USD 0.76 million. Norway, Denmark, Finland, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Germany have also contributed. Moreover, the Dutch

multinational TPG is presently providing technical

assistance aimed at improving WFP's in-country logistical capacity.

Executive Board approval

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